

Japan's Culinary Heritage

SMALL-GROUP GUIDED TOUR



This culinary journey visits key locations such as the ancient Imperial capital of Kyoto, as well as hidden rural villages and the unique culture of Awaji Island in the fabled inland Sea, for a beach lunch experience, where culinary traditions have been handed down from generation to generation. From foraging for wild ingredients and harvesting the bounty of the land, to cooking lessons with emblematic figures and alongside members of local communities, this culinary adventure will show you how food is the most intimate way to uncover Japan's history and culture. Japan is blessed with rich natural products from 'Satoyama' landscape of rural Japan, which is the border area between arable flat land where rice is grown, and the mountains. Managed sustainably over centuries, Satoyama is biologically diverse and supports a wide variety of wildlife throughout four seasons, offering a great variety of dishes and regional specialties. Japanese cuisine uniqueness is the fruit of a long tradition of worshiping the harvest of ingredients, always respecting nature. Food culture in Japan is also closely related to festivals and rituals, and reflects the way of living of each

particular region. Travelling from mountainous village to fishing port towns, staying in a rural thatched-roof house and in the dazzling cities, you will taste the sake, experience the food and the culture, awaken your senses and share unforgettable moments with people you'll meet on your journey. Our journey starts in Tokyo, and takes us to the local food market in Kanazawa, hunting wild plants with local villagers in Gokayama. Then, you will travel to Shirakawago, a World Heritage Site, and Takayama, where a local community will host you in an old Kominca house. There, you will learn Okudo-san cooking (earth oven cooking) and visit a sake brewery. In Asuka, ancient capital of Japan before Kyoto and Nara, we visit Era-san's family, organic farmers, for an "outdoor kitchen" experience, using locally produced vegetables. This tour also visits the fishing village of Awaji, before heading to the Imperial capital of Kyoto where you will enjoy Kaiseki dinner cooked by one of the most famous chefs in Kyoto in the exclusive settings of a wonderful property not typically opened to the public. Your kaiseki dinner will be prepared and explained by the 30-year experience Chef Taro Katayama.

DETAILS

DATES & PRICES

Please see website

TOUR LENGTH

11 days

TYPE AND LEVEL OF TRIP

Moderate - 11 days of countryside exploration with various physical and craft experiences: harvesting, foraging, cooking alongside members of the community.

WHAT'S INCLUDED

Full-time services of an English-speaking tour guide; 10 nights in hotels and Japanese-style inns (Ryokan and Minshuku); Daily breakfast, 6 dinners, 4 lunches; All transportation between tour locations; Entrance to museums, temples and other sights on the group's itinerary; Forwarding of one item of luggage

HIGHLIGHTS



1



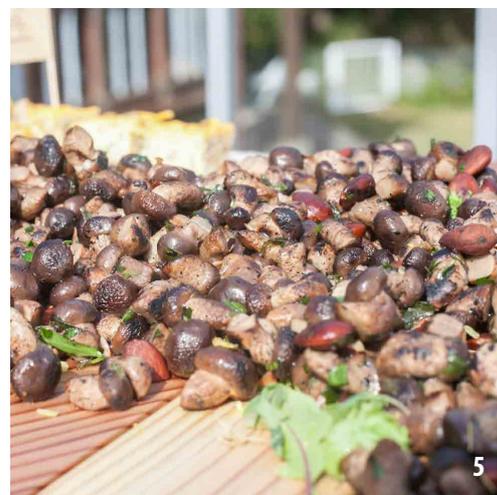
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- Visit Kanazawa's local food market which has attracted residents and visitors for almost 300 years
- Hunt for wild vegetables (Sansai) with a Sansai expert and learn traditional cooking methods with the Gokayama community
- Learn the art of earth-oven cooking with a 70-year old grandmother in Hida-Furukawa and visit a locally-run sake brewery in Takayama
- Visit a family-run organic farm and join family members at an outdoor cookery experience amongst their rice fields in Asuka
- Visit Awaji Island to learn about its seafood culture and enjoy a beach lunch with a local food-designer chef
- Enjoy an exclusive Kaiseki dinner in a private property not typically opened to the public, produced by a master chef with three decades of experience

1 *Cooking in a classic earth oven (Okudo-san)*

2 *Tofu-making process*

3 *Enjoying the company of local communities in rural Japan*

4 *Preparing local vegetables*

5 *Mushrooms in Awaji Island where we experience a food-scape beach lunch*

6 *Chilli peppers drying*

7 *Fish auction on Awaji Island*

ITINERARY

DAY 1 > Arrive in Tokyo

Meet your guide and other group members at the tour hotel in central Tokyo in the evening. We head out into the city's exciting streets and your guide will advise you the best options for food and drink. You might want to try an Izakaya restaurant. Izakaya are the quintessential Japanese destinations for casual eating and drinking - the two go hand in hand in Japan and these bars cluster around railway and subway stations. Join a post-work crowd relaxing over some of their favourite small dishes and their favourite beers, Sake and shochu.

Accommodation: Hotel

DAY 2 > Travel to Kanazawa

We catch the train for Kanazawa on the Japan Sea coast. Seat of the powerful Maeda Clan during the Edo Period, Kanazawa had a grand castle and was a city of great cultural accomplishments, including a refined and sophisticated local cuisine. For lunch we visit the local food market Oomi Ichiba, "Kanazawa citizens' kitchen pantry". The market has attracted residents and visitors for centuries. In the evening we taste the local specialty Kaga-ryori for dinner. Kaga-ryori uses the freshest local seafood and vegetables served on colourful Kutani porcelain, or on lacquerware made in Ishikawa Prefecture. Notable Kaga-ryori dishes include Kabura-zushi (salted yellowtail sandwiched between turnips), Jibu-ni (stewed duck with vegetables) and Tai-no-karamushi (steamed sea bream with vegetables).

Accommodation: Hotel

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 3 > Foraging experience in Gokayama

Today we travel by private motorcoach from Kanazawa to Gokayama, a World Heritage Site with distinctive Gassho-zukuri farmhouses sporting triangular thatched roofs which are unique to this part of Japan. Located in a mountainous region isolated from the rest of the country for centuries, villagers still follow traditional lifestyles, gathering and preserving Sansai (wild plants) and growing their own vegetables and mushrooms. We join local plant hunter Ms Ueda to



explore the surrounding mountains and harvest seasonal wild delicacies. We visit the home of local resident Mr. Nakanishi, who grows a special variety of rice for brewing Sake. Tasting home-brewed Sake, called Doburoku, is an unparalleled experience and to complement the Sake, villagers will show us how to cook our finds from the mountains to produce delicious local dishes.

Accommodation: Minshuku (Family-run guesthouse)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 4 > Shirakawa-go and Takayama

After a traditional Japanese breakfast we depart by highway bus to visit nearby Shirakawa-go which has its own impressive collection of Gassho-zukuri houses and has been a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1995. After lunch in Shirakawa-go, we continue onwards to Takayama nestled in the mountainous Hida region. Takayama boasts a beautifully preserved old town and a unique culture. It has retained much traditional architecture and is known for its crafts, particularly yew carving, Shunkei lacquerware, pottery and furniture. This evening, sit down to a multi-course Kaiseki dinner at our family-run Ryokan. Kaiseki cuisine is the ultimate style of Japanese food, and both the preparation methods and appearance are refined. Imbuing dishes with a seasonal feel and bringing out the natural flavours of the ingredients are key elements. Only seasonal ingredients passing intense scrutiny are used for the menu. But sometimes ingredients called "Hashiri" that have been harvested before their seasons are included as treasured items.

Each individual dish is a small portion, but colours, combinations and presentation of ingredients, together with tableware, all express the aesthetics of Japanese culture.

Accommodation: Ryokan (Travellers Inn)

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 5 > Classic earth oven cooking experience in Hida Fukukawa

Today, we take a short train ride to Hida Furukawa, a beautifully-preserved old town with distinctive white-walled storehouses retaining the atmosphere of the Edo Period.

Entering one of the oldest Machiya traditional residences, a local grandmother will show us the technique of cooking in a classic earth oven known as an “Okudo-san” which is rarely used in modern times. We will also use a traditional fireplace to grill premium quality Hida Beef. After lunch, we have time to explore the town and taste Sake at the local brewery, which produces the finest Sake in the region. There will be free time to stroll the town of Takayama and chance to dine out at one of the local restaurants.

Accommodation: Ryokan (Travellers Inn)

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 6 > Travel from Takayama to Osaka

We board our train in Takayama with Ekiben lunch box for Osaka. Osaka was historically known as the “Tenka no daidokoro” (the nation’s kitchen), famous not just for its Michelin starred restaurants, but particularly for its street food – takoyaki, okonomiyaki, and more – the food of the common man. For dinner, we will visit a hidden house in the downtown of Namba, owned by a unique Sake specialty shop, Yamanaka Sake. The shop owner has fallen in love with Sake and is dedicated to fulfilling the intentions of Sake brewers for over 30 years, and has been interacting with Sake aficionados with the same level of enthusiasm with over 10,000 bottles of Sake collections, all of which are from local specialty brewers. The term “Sakana” traditionally refers to food served to accompany Sake as originated from the word Saka (Sake) and Na (food). Special delicacies which pair well with selected Sake varieties are served for today’s dinner.

Accommodation: Hotel

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 7 > Asuka - Outdoor kitchen experience

This morning, we travel by local train to Asuka, Japan’s first permanent capital. Sitting at the southern edge of the Yamato Plain, Asuka is home to some of the first

Buddhist temples in Japan, built by Prince Shotoku in the 6th century. The small town is also dotted with burial mounds, said to be those of the first Emperors. As well as its historical legacy, Asuka also has a beautiful landscape of terraced rice fields. This morning, we visit a small-scale producing organic farmer who left city life 10 years ago and moved to the village. We have a chance to harvest vegetables and learn home cooking in the peaceful outdoor setting. If weather does not permit, the lunch venue will be a charming old Japanese house nearby. We have a true farm-to-table experience of preparing local dishes using vegetables grown in the area. The fruits of our labour will be our lunch today. In the afternoon we return to Osaka; the evening is at leisure.

Accommodation: Hotel

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch

DAY 8 > Awaji Island - Foodscape experience

Awaji is known as the birthplace of the Japanese archipelago, when the gods Izanagi and Izanami first created an island here. Awaji has long been known as a Miketsukuni (a place of food production for emperors). We visit a fish auction at a port and a local producer of the classic Japanese semi-dried fish call Shirasu Boshi. We rendez-vous on the coast for the ultimate beach lunch experience. If the weather is unkind, we will eat our delicious meal at a former primary school, now renovated as a lovely artistic café. Our chef today is a real artist and prepares what he calls a “Foodscape” (a food landscape). Using locally harvested ingredients, he uses his inspiration to create a natural landscape that will delight all your senses. Our accommodation tonight is a Ryokan on Awaji Island and in the evening, we browse the lively port’s backstreets and enjoy the drinking culture of Awaji Island with fresh local seafood.

Accommodation: Hotel

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

DAY 9 > Travel to Kyoto

We travel back from Awaji island in the afternoon by train and head to the colourful Nishiki market, which has a well-deserved reputation for being Kyoto’s kitchen to see the fish, crab, pickles, tea, sweets and other foodstuffs on display. We will also discover the back lanes and traditions of Gion – a district famous for its Geisha (known as Geiko in Kyoto) and the brightly attired apprentice Geisha, known locally as Maiko. Dinner is at your leisure today on Gion-Shijo street.

Accommodation: Hotel

Meals: Breakfast

DAY 10 > Kyoto - Kaiseki dinner

Kyoto is renowned throughout Japan for its regional Washoku cuisine and specialities, also for the refinement and artistic presentation of Kaiseki cuisine. Follow your guide to some of Kyoto's historical treasures. Starting from Nanzenji, a tranquil Zen Buddhist temple whose history dates back to the mid 13th century, we stroll along the Philosopher's Path, with craft shops, cafés, shrines and temples beside the clear waters of a small canal. The path ends near Ginkakuji, the Silver Pavilion. In the evening, there is a Farewell Dinner. You will enjoy a Kaiseki banquet in a private property not typically open to the public. The wonderful Japanese villa was built by Takeda Goichi and its garden was designed by historically notable

gardener Ogawa Jihei. Your expert chef for the evening has 30 years of experience in Kyo Ryori and will cook the finest ingredients for you, explaining the intricacies of Kaiseki Ryori cuisine, the pinnacle of Japan's culinary traditions.

Accommodation: Hotel

Meals: Breakfast, Dinner

DAY 11 > Tour ends in Kyoto

Our tour ends after breakfast at the hotel in Kyoto. Your guide will offer advice on your journey to the airport for your homeward flight, or on onward travel in Japan if you are extending your stay.

Meals: Breakfast



EXCLUSIVE BEHIND-THE-SCENE CULINARY EXPERIENCES:



Era-san and her family - outdoor kitchen experience

The engaging Yoko Era is an example of Japan's I-turn movement: she left her busy city life to settle in the peaceful Japanese countryside. In the agricultural community of Asuka, Era-san and her family, who are now organic farmers, will welcome you to their home and prepare an eco-friendly picnic lunch amidst their organic rice fields.



Chef Shinse - foodscape beach lunch on Awaji Island

Rendezvous on the coast for the ultimate beach lunch experience... your chef today is a real artist and will prepare for you his signature "Foodscape". Using locally harvested ingredients, he applies his inspiration to create an edible landscape that will delight all your senses.



Nakanishi-san (sake brewer) - Community-hosted lunch in Gokayama

Toga-mura is a small-scale local community in the hidden valley of Gokayama. Ueda-san is a Sansai (wild vegetable) specialist and Nakanishi-san cultivates rice to brew Doburoku sake. They will take us foraging for seasonal produce and we'll call at villagers' houses on the way, tasting some home-preserved Sansai. The villagers will collaborate to produce a community-hosted lunch for us.



Chef Taro Katayama - Kaiseki dinner at a private property

In Kyoto, we enjoy an exclusive Kaiseki dinner experience in a private property typically not open to the public. The historic garden was designed by the noted gardener Ogawa Jihei. Your chef for the evening has 30 years of experience as a 'Kyo Ryori' (traditional Kyoto cuisine) master. He will cook the finest ingredients for you and explain the intricacies of the ultimate culinary art - Kaiseki Ryori cuisine, the culmination of Japan's culinary traditions.